REPRESENTATIVE FOR
CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Office of the
Representative for Children and Youth

Service Plan
2007/08 to 2009/10

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REPRESENTATIVE FOR
CHILDREN AND YOUTH

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Message from the Representative for Children and Youth

I am pleased to present the first Service Plan for the Office of the Representative for Children and Youth. The Plan reflects our goals and objectives over the next three years. In the coming year, I will review this Plan with children and youth, government and non-government child and youth serving organizations, and others to obtain feedback and confirm the direction outlined in the Plan. I will then present, in 2008-09, a revised and updated Service Plan for the remaining term of my appointment.

As an independent body, external to government, we have four key responsibilities: we provide information and advocacy services for vulnerable children and youth and their families respecting designated services provided by government and other public bodies; we review and investigate the critical injury or death of a child or youth receiving a government service that is subject to review; we monitor designated services for children and youth to ensure that they are effective, responsive and that the child and youth serving system is publicly accountable; and we conduct evidence-based research and assessment in order to make recommendations to better inform the development and delivery of child and youth services.

Children and youth are among the most significant users of public services such as education, health care, childcare, and child welfare services, yet they have no access to influence government agendas. We are helping children and youth make sure their rights and interests are protected and upheld, and that their voices are heard and considered in decision-making. We also provide general information and advice on the rights of children and youth, and engage in extensive outreach to community organizations to assist them in providing advocacy support to children and youth in their communities. In advocating for young people, my Office is guided by the rights articulated in the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*, the *Child, Family and Community Service Act*, and the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

Through our advocacy work, both individual and community, we are working to identify trends and patterns that will help inform broader public policy issues, and we will advocate for broad systemic change to the system.

Some of the most vulnerable in our province are Aboriginal children and youth. A key priority of my Office is to promote and support Aboriginal peoples in designing and putting in place initiatives aimed at addressing disparities between Aboriginal young people and other young British Columbians. Inherent rights, traditions and culture will be respected when addressing matters relating to Aboriginal children and youth.

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In carrying out our mandate to investigate and report on the critical injury or death of a child or youth receiving a reviewable service, my Office works collaboratively with other involved public bodies to establish a coordinated, responsive review and investigation process. The goal of these reviews and investigations is to identify trends and make recommendations to improve services, policies and practices to ensure that potential child deaths or injuries are avoided in the future.

As part of our monitoring priorities, my Office monitors and will report annually on government's implementation of the recommendations of the Hon. Ted Hughes' "BC Children and Youth Review", and work to encourage swift implementation across government. In consultation with government, I will make recommendations to the Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth respecting the development of an overarching government "Children's Plan". I will also report annually on the performance of the child and youth serving system as a whole in such important areas as safety, education, health and well-being.

I believe that my Office, working in collaboration and cooperation with our many partners, can help contribute to the achievement of better outcomes for our most vulnerable children and youth so that they can grow up safe, nurtured, cared for, educated and healthy, and become confident, contributing members of society.

It has been said that children are the living messages we send to a time we will not see. This statement is a poignant reminder of our obligation – as individuals, as families, as communities, and as governments – to leave a valuable legacy to succeeding generations.

Sincerely,

Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond
Representative for Children and Youth

November 2007

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Overview of Office

Establishment of the Representative for Children and Youth

In April 2006, the Honourable Ted Hughes, Q.C., released the final report of the BC Children and Youth Review, his independent review of the child protection system. The recommendations of that review, known as the Hughes Review, were publicly endorsed by both the British Columbia Government and the Official Opposition.

Hughes called for sweeping changes to the child and youth serving system in the province. A central recommendation was to establish an external, independent body that would report publicly to the Legislative Assembly through a select standing committee on children and youth. Hughes recommended that this body perform two key functions. A primary function would be the promotion and coordination of advocacy services for children and youth. He found a strong consensus that children, youth and their families needed support, advice, information and assistance in accessing and resolving conflicts with the child and youth serving system. He called for this new body to advocate for the interests, rights and views of children and youth. Hughes believed that, over time, the resolution of individual cases would help identify causes of recurring problems and offer constructive resolutions for improvement. As well, he recommended that the independent body push for change to the system from an informed but external perspective.

Hughes also called for this proposed new body to monitor and review the performance of the child and youth serving system and publicly report on its effectiveness and responsiveness. The objective was clear: to improve outcomes for children and youth accessing the child and youth serving system in areas such as child safety, permanency placement, adoption and education. As part of its monitoring function, the external body would review certain deaths and critical injuries of children and youth who were in care at the time, or who had been receiving child and youth services during the preceding year, with a goal of helping prevent the recurrence of similar injuries or deaths in the future.

While the Hughes Review recommended a monitoring role for the external body, he noted that most government ministries are not subject to formal oversight by an external body and in the future, there may be no need for an independent oversight body. If government's own performance measurement, quality assurance programs and public reporting were to become sufficient to assure the public that vulnerable children and youth are being protected as they should be, there may be no need for such a body. Hughes proposed a review of the Office's oversight responsibility in five years and suggested it be revised as appropriate at that time. The legislation creating the Office of the Representative for Children and Youth widened the scope of such a review to include the entire mandate of the Office.

The provincial government moved to adopt and implement some of these recommendations. On May 18, 2006, the *Representative for Children and Youth Act* was passed. On November 26, 2006, a special committee of the Legislative Assembly recommended the appointment of Judge Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond as Representative for Children and Youth for a five-year term. This appointment was unanimously approved by the Legislative Assembly on December 5, 2006. On March 29, 2007 the *Child and Youth Statutes (Representative Improvement) Amendment Act* was passed. It amended a number of statutes and provided the legislative foundation for the implementation of the Hughes recommendations.

The Representative replaced the (then) existing Officer for Children and Youth. For the period January 1 to March 31, 2007, the new Representative was also the Acting Child and Youth Officer. This transitional period allowed the Representative to fulfill continuing statutory obligations of the Child and Youth Officer and provided for an orderly winding up of the business of that Office and the transfer of continuing functions from that Office to the new Office of the Representative for Children and Youth.

Vision

An organization highly valued for championing the fundamental rights of vulnerable children and youth, and for promoting improvements in the delivery of services to children, youth and their families that result in better lives for children and youth.

Mandate

The mandate of the Representative for Children and Youth includes the following:

1) **Advocacy** - the Representative

- provides information, advice and support to children, youth and their families who need help in dealing with "designated services" under the child and youth serving system and ensures that the rights and interests of children and youth are protected and upheld, and their views heard and considered by decision makers;
- promotes and encourages self-advocacy and development of community advocacy organizations through outreach, information, education and support;
- builds awareness, engagement and capacity at the community level in supporting and assisting the healthy development of children, youth and their families; and
- advocates for changes to the child and youth serving system itself to improve its effectiveness and responsiveness.

The child and youth serving system includes ***designated services*** ,which means any of the following services or programs for children and their families provided under an enactment or provided or funded by government:

a) services or programs under the *Adoption Act*, the *Child, Family and Community Service Act*, the *Community Living Authority Act* and the *Youth Justice Act*;
b) early childhood development and child care services;
c) mental health services for children;
d) addiction services for children;
e) services for youth and young adults during their transition to adulthood;
f) additional service or programs prescribed by regulation under the *Representative for Children and Youth Act*.

2) **Monitoring** – the Representative monitors and evaluates designated child and youth services and makes recommendations to improve the effectiveness and responsiveness of these services. The Representative will report publicly on its monitoring and evaluation activities, including issuing reports on the implementation of recommendations endorsed by the Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth.

3) **Reviewing and Investigating Critical Injuries and Deaths of Children** – the Representative collects information on critical injuries and deaths of children or youth receiving specified "reviewable services". The Representative conducts reviews for the purpose of identifying and analyzing recurring issues to inform improvements to services and to aid in the prevention of similar injuries or deaths in the future, and may investigate the critical injury or death of an individual child or youth. The Representative will produce reports that aggregate and analyze the information received from reviews and from investigations conducted. Where the Representative conducts an investigation into a critical injury or death of a child or youth, the Representative must produce a report on the investigation.

> *Reviewable services* – are service or programs under the *Child, Family and Community Service Act* and the *Youth Justice Act*; mental health services for children; addiction services for children; and additional "designated services" that may be designated under a Regulation.

4) **Research, Data Collection and Analysis** – the Representative will conduct evidence-based research and assessment for the purpose of making recommendations to better inform the development and delivery of child and youth services and improve results in the areas of safety, health, education and well-being for vulnerable children and youth in the Province. The Office will collaborate with other public bodies and agencies and post-secondary institutions in conducting these activities and may produce joint or sole reports outlining the findings and conclusions of these efforts.

Our Approach to Fulfilling our Mandate

To be effective in achieving our mandate, we must have the confidence and trust of the public. Public confidence and trust are created in two ways: 1) by the legislated independence of the Representative and her Office; and 2) by the integrity and effectiveness of the Office in carrying out its duties and responsibilities.

Our Office has been provided with the necessary attributes of independence, through the *Representative for Children and Youth Act*, which provides the Representative with independent powers of review, investigation, monitoring and reporting. The Office is external to government, reporting to the Legislative Assembly through the Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth; and the Representative is appointed by a unanimous vote of the Legislative Assembly for a term of five years.

The effectiveness of our Office is dependent on how we carry out our duties and responsibilities. We will be open and transparent in our conduct; we will work in a collegial and collaborative way with all those involved in providing services to children and youth; and we will remain determined to achieve better outcomes for vulnerable young people.

In our interaction with children and youth we will be respectful, friendly, clear and easy to approach; we will be calm, helpful and empathetic; and we will ensure that young people feel safe and protected in all their dealings with us.

Our Office will earn respect through exhibiting the highest standards of ethical and professional behaviour, and through thorough analysis and demonstrated understanding of complex issues. At all times we will use a measured, evaluative and evidence-based approach and our focus will be child-centred. Operating in this way will enhance the integrity and credibility of the Office without inhibiting the Office's independence or its responsibility to constructively criticize aspects of the child and youth serving system, when such criticism is warranted.

Through our reporting relationship with the Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth, the Representative will endeavour to build a greater understanding of BC's child and youth serving system among legislators and the public. The Representative will play a lead role in encouraging a non-partisan approach by all in order to address challenges facing the system, and take advantage of opportunities to improve it.

We will be guided in the performance of our responsibilities by the rights of children and youth as reflected in

- the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was signed by Canada in 1991 following endorsement by unanimous resolution of the British Columbia Legislature;
- the *Child, Family and Community Service Act*; and
- the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

The *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* sets out the basic human rights that children everywhere have: the right to survival; to develop to the fullest; to protection from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation; and to participate fully in family, cultural and social life. The four core principles of the Convention are non-discrimination; devotion to the best interests of the child; the right to life, survival and development; and respect for the views of the child. Every right spelled out in the Convention is inherent to the human dignity and harmonious development of every child. The Convention protects children's rights by setting standards in health care, education, and legal, civil and social services.

Focus on Aboriginal Peoples

A focus of our Office will be on Aboriginal children and youth. This includes engaging with, collaborating with and establishing partnerships with Aboriginal communities to deliver outreach, advocacy and support for initiatives that improve results for Aboriginal children and youth. We will work to do this in a way that respects their unique sense of place, culture, language and community. We will also partner and work with the provincial and federal government in addressing issues related to Aboriginal children and youth receiving government services.

Strategic Context

Many young people in British Columbia grow up in homes feeling safe and secure, well-nourished and healthy. However, for our most vulnerable young people, the reality is one of family breakdowns, poverty, addictions, abuse, and other problems. Achieving better results for vulnerable children and youth includes understanding the interrelationship and impact of social, economic, cultural, educational and environmental factors on a child's development and his or her overall health and well-being.

An examination of the challenges and opportunities facing the Office helps to identify factors likely to affect the Office's success in achieving its goals. As well, awareness of these factors allows the Office to take advantage of opportunities and take steps to minimize negative impacts.

Challenges and Opportunities

- The British Columbia population structure is changing towards an older, more ethnically diverse population. In the foreseeable future, an increasing number of elderly will be supported by a decreasing number of young earners. An increasing portion of children and youth will be Aboriginal and new immigrants, particularly those of Asian descent.
- Children and youth who are in care or receiving services from the child and youth serving system are more vulnerable than the general population. They are less likely to be healthy or educated, and more likely to live in poverty, experience family violence and/or sexual and emotional abuse, have a higher incidence of special needs, behavioural issues or mental illness, experience a higher level of incarceration, and have a higher rate of dependence on income assistance.

Vulnerable children
The Representative advocates for vulnerable children and youth across British Columbia between the ages of birth and 18 years, and will also consider issues related to the transition of vulnerable children to adulthood. This includes children who are in the care of government, in foster care or in the home of a relative under a government program. It also includes children and families receiving or participating in government-funded child and family development and support services, including programs to address mental health issues and behavioural problems. These children are vulnerable in a number of key areas and need the protection and support of the Province in order to overcome these challenges and reach their potential.

- Trends for children and youth who are in care or receiving services from the child and youth serving system are compounded for Aboriginal children and youth. Only seven per cent of BC's child and youth population are Aboriginal, but more than 50 per cent of children and youth in care are Aboriginal. The number of children and youth in care declined by 11.3 per cent over the five-year period between 2000/01 and 2005/06, but the number of Aboriginal children and youth in care increased. In BC, about 1 in 20 aboriginal children are in care, while only 1 in 100 of the total BC child and youth population are in care. Forty-three per cent of youth in custody are Aboriginal.
- The economy of British Columbia is vibrant and projections are this will continue into the foreseeable future. Times of economic prosperity mean that increased focus and resources can more easily be dedicated to addressing the needs of the most vulnerable in our society.
- Government has adopted many of the Hughes Review recommendations that are intended to strengthen the child and youth serving system and implementation is progressing.
- Cross-ministry initiatives are occurring that have the potential to enhance progress in addressing deficits in the education, health and well-being of vulnerable children and youth. Programs such as Act Now BC, StrongStart BC, ReadNow BC and others are focused on improving outcomes for British Columbia children and youth.
- Internally, the upcoming year will see the Office focused on establishing administrative and operational foundations for its operations. This includes recruiting staff, including Aboriginal staff, and putting in place policies, procedures and practices to support the effective, efficient and successful realization of the Office's mandate.

Goals, Objectives, Strategies and Performance Measures

Goals

The Office of the Representative for Children and Youth has three main goals:

1. Vulnerable children and youth have their rights and interests protected and upheld, and their voices heard and considered;
2. The work of the Office supports improved results for vulnerable children and youth;
3. The Office delivers its mandate in a child-centred, open, collaborative, accountable and responsive way.

Objectives, Strategies and Performance Measures

Goal 1 – Vulnerable children and youth have their rights and interests protected and upheld, and their voices heard and considered

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Objective 1.1 – British Columbians are informed of and understand the rights of children and youth, and are aware of services available to support vulnerable children and youth

Strategies

We will:

- inform and educate children and youth about the advocacy support and advice provided by our Office and how to access it, and actively promote the services available to support vulnerable children and youth;
- prepare and disseminate publications, and host presentations and workshops in communities with community and child and youth organizations about the rights of children and youth;
- identify and work with community partners to build understanding and engage communities in supporting and promoting the development of vulnerable children, youth and their families.

Objective 1.2 - Agencies providing child and youth services respect the rights of vulnerable children and youth, and promote children and youth in effectively participating in decisions about their life

Strategies

We will:

- work with child and youth serving agencies to ensure that consideration of the rights of children and youth are integrated into policies and practices, and that children and youth are active participants in the decision-making process;
- work with government bodies and agencies who serve vulnerable children and youth to review their dispute resolution processes, to determine their effectiveness and responsiveness in achieving timely and fair resolution of disagreements, and advocate for changes where appropriate.

Objective 1.3 – Children and youth have access to expanded and enhanced advocacy supports and services

Strategies

We will:

- deliver through our Office expanded and enhanced advocacy supports and services to children and youth in relation to designated government-funded services and programs;
- work with communities to provide outreach, training, education and other resources in support of the development of comprehensive community-based advocacy programs.

Objective 1.4 - Children and youth have access to advocacy services that reflect their unique culture, beliefs, values and needs

Strategies

We will:

- consult with communities, including First Nations communities and Aboriginal peoples, to identify their needs for advocacy services and collaborate with them on the design and implementation of community advocacy programs that meet their needs;
- review and consider services and programs currently available, consult with immigrant communities to identify their needs for advocacy services, and work to design and implement relevant and effective advocacy services for British Columbia's growing population of immigrant children and youth.

Performance Measures	Targets		
	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Note: the table contains no percentage values, as we are developing and determining appropriate baseline percentages.			
Broad dissemination of information, materials and education about the rights of children and youth and available services	# of pamphlets, forums, workshops, speeches, presentations, learning events	# of pamphlets, forums, workshops, speeches, presentations, learning events	# of pamphlets, forums, workshops, speeches, presentations, learning events
Expanded advocacy services:			
• provided by the Office to children and youth and their families	Establish Office advocacy program and build awareness	Establish baseline - # of children and youth served by the Office	# or % increase in children and youth served by the Office
• provided by community-based organizations and Aboriginal communities	Establish baseline - # of community organizations and aboriginal communities providing advocacy services	# or % increase in community organizations and Aboriginal communities providing advocacy services	# or % increase in community organizations and Aboriginal communities providing advocacy services
Children, youth and their families provided advocacy services by the Office indicate satisfaction with the support and services received		Establish baseline	% increase in satisfaction rate

Goal 2 – The work of the Office supports improved results for vulnerable children and youth

Objective 2.1 – Monitoring, review and reporting programs undertaken by the Office identify issues and make recommendations to improve results for vulnerable children and youth in key areas of safety, health, education and well-being

Strategies

We will:

- undertake a thoughtful and focused monitoring program of observation, research, evaluation and review to assess designated services for children and youth, and prepare public reports that will be provided to the Legislative Assembly on the effectiveness, responsiveness and accountability of these services and programs;
- monitor the timely implementation of the recommendations contained in the Hughes Review;
- engage and collaborate with other independent Officers of the Legislature and public bodies on matters of importance for children and youth.

Objective 2.2 – The review and investigation of critical injuries and deaths of children and youth informs improvements to services, to aid in the prevention of similar injuries or deaths in the future

Strategies

We will:

- work collaboratively with other public bodies to build, establish and maintain an effective, accountable and responsive child and youth critical injury and death review and investigation process;
- undertake a review of current internal critical injury and child death review processes within the child and youth serving system, to ensure policies, practices and processes are fair and timely, and make recommendations to improve their effectiveness and responsiveness.

Objective 2.3 – The Office facilitates the development of a Children's Plan and measures outcomes to promote improved results for vulnerable children and youth

Strategies

We will:

- consult with child and youth serving ministries and champion the development of an integrated, overarching Children's Plan that outlines key goals and outcomes for children and youth in British Columbia;
- encourage the development and acceptance of performance indicators to assess the overall health and well-being of vulnerable children and youth, and report annually to the Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth and the public.

Performance Measures	Targets		
	2007/08 Actual	2008/09	2009/10
Note: the table contains no percentage values, as we are developing and determining appropriate baseline percentages.			
Recommendations from monitoring and review activities accepted for implementation by child and youth serving agencies	% accepted	% accepted	% accepted
Recommendations from monitoring and review activities endorsed by the Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth	% endorsed	% endorsed	% endorsed
Recommendations from critical injury and death reviews and investigations accepted for implementation by child and youth serving agencies	% accepted	% accepted	% accepted
Recommendations from critical injury and death reviews and investigations endorsed by the Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth	% endorsed	% endorsed	% endorsed
Collaborative reviews and reports undertaken with other independent Officers and public bodies	# of joint activities, projects, reviews, reports	# of joint activities, projects, reviews, reports	# of joint activities, projects, reviews, reports

Goal 3 - The Office delivers its mandate in a child-centred, open, collaborative, accountable and responsive way

Objective 3.1 - A diverse, competent and professional staff

Strategies

We will:

- ensure that staff have sufficient knowledge and resources and are supported through training and professional development;
- develop a recruitment and succession strategy to ensure that staff are representative of the population served by the Office.

Objective 3.2 – Effective infrastructure, operations and practices to fulfill all mandates of the Office

Strategies

We will:

- establish and maintain a presence throughout British Columbia to ensure access to our services;
- develop a comprehensive communications strategy that will build and maintain public awareness – in particular with children and youth, their families, government ministries and relevant public bodies – about who we are, what we do , how we do it and how our services can be accessed;
- arrange regular meetings of the Children's Forum (includes the Representative, the Public Guardian and Trustee, the Ombudsman, the Chief Coroner, the Provincial Health Officer and the Provincial Director of Child Welfare) to ensure regular, open discussion and action on issues of concern related to children, youth and their families;
- develop, implement and maintain policies, procedures, practices and protocols that reflect our values of openness, transparency, efficiency, effectiveness, accountability and integrity of the Office.

Performance Measure	Targets		
	2007/08 Actual	2008/09	2009/10
Note: the table contains no percentage values, as we are developing and determining appropriate baseline percentages.			
Performance review assessing degree to which Office is child-centred, accessible, open, collaborative, accountable and responsive		Establish baseline for annual performance review	% increase in achievement of performance goals

Resource Summary

2007/08 Budget

The base operating budget allocated to the Representative's Office for the first year of operations is $4,815,000. The Representative has now had the advantage of commencing operations as well as an opportunity to carry out a strategic planning process. The Representative will be seeking an increase to the current base budget in order to fulfill the mandate, goals and objectives of the organization.

Organization

The organizational structure is being refined as implementation of operations is being completed. Currently the organization has 30 staff positions, in addition to the Representative for Children and Youth, and has offices in the Lower Mainland, Prince George and Victoria.

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